

CPS REFORM WATCH

CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at www.de.state.az.us and on the Governor's website at www.governor.state.az.us.

April 2004

May is Foster Care Appreciation Month! – Events to recognize the invaluable contributions that foster parents and case managers protecting abused and neglected children are being held throughout Arizona this month. In Maricopa County, the recently formed Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents (AZAFAP) is hosting events on May 19 and May 20 at Wesley Bolin Plaza. On May 19 from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m., foster parents, case managers, advocates and supporters will begin the task of tying 8,399 blue ribbons on the trees at the state Capitol. On May 20 at 9 a.m., the Governor will tie the final ribbon and in total, they will represent the 8,400 children in out-of-home care in Arizona. The presentation will include comments from the Governor, DES Director David Berns, AZAFAP President Kris Jacober, a former foster child and a current case manager. Representatives of local licensing agencies will be available to answer questions from individuals who are interested in becoming foster parents and DES personnel staff will be on hand to answer questions from those interested in joining the team at Child Protective Services.

Stipends and Recruitment of Additional CPS Staff – There are 131 CPS staff members currently receiving a Master of Social Work stipend. In April, testing for the bilingual stipend, a verbal fluency exam administered by an independent contractor, was implemented. In April, one CPS employee completed the entire process and is receiving a bilingual stipend. Approximately 35 other CPS staff are in the testing process.

DES staff have been aggressively recruiting additional case managers. Between January and April, 109 case managers were hired. Forty-eight (48) of these positions were to fill vacancies; 61 of these were new positions funded by HB 2024. This number is on target with the hiring plan established during the special session. The Division plans to hire between 21 and 23 case managers each month through June, which will achieve the goal of 104 additional case managers by the end of the fiscal year.

ACYF District One hosted a job fair on Saturday, April 24. Information on the job fair was placed in the local metropolitan and college newspapers, as well as through the schools of social work at the universities. More than 100 individuals interested in joining the CPS team participated in the job fair. Seventy-eight (78) applicants met the minimum qualifications; the majority of the qualified applicants were interviewed on the spot. Their applications now continue through the reference and background process.

Develop Statewide Prevention System – This spring the Governor signed into law SB1149, a bill which allows the nationally recognized Healthy Families program to now serve women who are pregnant as well as families who have had previous contact with CPS. Healthy Families Arizona is a statewide system of home visitation services for families with newborns that builds

on family strengths, promotes health, optimizes child development and prevents child abuse and neglect.

Policy Changes Required by HB 2024 – This legislation required significant policy changes in areas like: the use of drugs and alcohol as a factor in determining whether a child has been abused or neglected; release of CPS information to authorized individuals; and increased oversight of the decision to remove children from their homes. Major policy changes required by HB 2024 have been made. These have been incorporated into the CPS Policy Manual used by all case workers and supervisors. They are part of the training new caseworkers receive; training regarding the policy revisions for the remainder of the CPS staff is being developed.

Governor's Oversight Committee on CPS Reform – On April 7, the members of the newly appointed Governor's Oversight Committee on CPS Reform met for the first time. This committee will provide the Governor's Office, CPS and other interested state agencies feedback regarding the "real life" impact of our ongoing reform efforts. The twenty-three members include case managers and supervisors with CPS; case managers with contracted service providers; representatives from law enforcement and probation; kinship, foster care and shelter care providers; pediatricians; a parent; a school social worker; a tribal social service representative; and representatives from community and faith-based volunteer organizations. A foster youth board member will also be appointed to this group. At the meeting, the Governor shared with the Committee the important role they have in the reform of Arizona's child protection system and thanked them for their willingness to participate. The Committee will receive regular updates on the progress of reform and will meet quarterly. The next Governor's Oversight Committee meeting will be held on July 15th from 10 a.m. to noon at 1700 W. Washington, 2nd Floor Conference Room.

Improve Medical/Dental Services Provided to Foster Children – AHCCCS and DCYF hosted a series of focus groups and stakeholder surveys to identify recommendations related to the delivery of health and dental care services to foster children. Approximately 90 stakeholders participated in the AHCCCS/CMDP Partnership for Health Foster Care Focus Groups that were held in Phoenix, Mesa, Flagstaff and Tucson. At the focus groups, the participants were broken up into small working groups, where, with the help of facilitators, they identified their top answers to the five questions posed on a prepared survey. AHCCCS Administration is in the process of compiling the participant's comments. The next step for the AHCCCS/CMDP Partnership in Health Foster Care Program project is to distribute the survey utilized at the focus groups to various stakeholders across Arizona that interact with children in foster care. The results of the survey will be compiled and compared to the results obtained from the focus groups. A final report will be prepared in the summer of 2004.

Jury Trials for Severance Hearings – In April, six jury trials were held in severance cases; five cases were in Tucson and one was in Yuma. This brings the total to ten jury trials in severance cases since February. In nine of the ten cases, the juries granted a verdict in favor of terminating parental rights. This action frees the children for adoption to safe, permanent homes. In cases where verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 30 additional cases statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

Implementation of the recommendations in the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe.